

STARVATION IN GAZA

Israeli lies and the tail that wags the dogs



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JAMAL KANJ

Whenever Israel yields to international pressure and allows aid trucks into Gaza, it devises other methods to ensure that food is never delivered. On July 26, Israel announced airdrops and "humanitarian corridors" for the United Nations convoys. Its forces also murdered 53 people seeking aid in those corridors on the same day. Rather than feeding the starving population, Israel turns the aid distribution points into killing zones. Time and again, Palestinians have been paying with blood for a loaf of bread or a bottle of water.

In less than two months, death by Israeli bullets at the so-called Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) has reached over 1,054, averaging about 20 killings daily. Since July 26, when Israel announced the new "humanitarian corridors," the death toll has more than doubled—325 last week alone—from the number of Palestinians killed daily at GHF distribution centres. Meanwhile, the tokenistic airdrops by Arab collaborators are nothing short of a disgrace.

The \$60 million that Donald Trump brags about giving to GHF is funding the deaths of hungry Palestinians. For the starved, GHF stands for *Gaza Humiliation Front*—not a lifeline, but an Israeli murder line. Instead of wasting American taxpayer money on these death traps, Trump should consider restoring US funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the only agency that has offered real hope to Palestinian children for more than 75 years.

Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff's visit to a GHF centre in Gaza, followed by his statement that there is no starvation, was a textbook case of confirmation bias. His tour did not reveal the absence of starvation, but rather

his willful blindness to see it. Witkoff sought out information that would reinforce his predetermined narrative to whitewash starvation.

To be honest, no one had seriously expected him to witness starvation at a carefully staged (safe) site, far removed from the people. He declined an invitation to visit a hospital in Gaza to see the starved children and hear directly from the life-saving medical professionals. Instead, he chose a photo op and listened to the mercenaries of death at GHF.

The engineered starvation in Gaza, supported by the US, has always been a central pillar of Israel's psychological warfare; a calculated strategy aimed at expelling the population or driving them into a survivalist frenzy. Israel and the US-funded GHF have become the perfect linchpin of this Israeli-designed contraption. Replacing a well-established UN infrastructure that operated 400 distribution centres, GHF offered only four aid points. These limited sites made it easier for Israel to surveil, shoot at the starving, and leave the survivors to fight over the meagre crumbs that remained.

GHF's role was exposed by Anthony Aguilar, a retired US Special Forces officer and recipient of the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. Choking back tears, Lt Col Aguilar recounted the story of a child who "walked 12 kilometres to reach" one of GHF's food distribution sites. "He got nothing but scraps, thanked us for it..." and then he was shot dead by the Israeli army.

Still, the "free" Western media has too often acted as Israel's public relations arm. It downplays Israel's horrific crimes and markets Israeli falsehoods, such as the baseless claim

that Hamas steals food aid. This narrative persisted even after USAID concluded that Israel failed to provide any evidence supporting that food aid was being diverted. Other than for Israeli military hindrance, under UN oversight, there have been no issues delivering food to all of Gaza. Israel's objective is simple: deflect responsibility by blaming the starving for their own starvation.

Early last June, I wrote on the Israeli

is the failed ceasefire talks. Listening to the Western media, one might conclude that the Palestinian negotiators rejected a "generous" offer for a ceasefire. In reality, the talks collapsed because Netanyahu sought only a pause to secure the release of captive Israeli soldiers, refusing to agree to end the war or the starvation blockade.

No rational party would accept, let alone consider, such a half-measure. When

recognise the state of Palestine, although long overdue, signals the growing frustration with Netanyahu's lies and deceit. The European officials made it clear, they were no longer willing to tolerate the Israeli farce. The symbolic act, however, would never atone for Britain's original sin—the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which promised European settlers a homeland in Palestine while failing to enshrine the rights of the indigenous Palestinians on their land. Nor does it exonerate France, which conspired with Britain in the secret 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement to carve up the eastern part of the Arab world.

Still, recognition matters. Fourteen other countries are poised to follow France's lead next month. The growing calls demanding Netanyahu agrees to a ceasefire are also telling. These governments have finally realised what their subjects had long known, that the absence of peace is not due to Palestinian rejectionism, but to Netanyahu's deception and insatiable thirst for the never-ending wars.

Despite the dominance of Israeli-embedded journalists and pundits in Western media, the world is finally waking up to the true face of Israel. Alternative media has, to a great extent, succeeded in piercing through the wall of Israeli lies, offering an unfiltered view into the lived horrors of starvation and genocide. No amount of Israeli propaganda can obscure the images of skeletal ribs jutting from the bodies of dying children. The sight of starving infants sucking on their bony fists indicts the liars.

To that end, a recent Gallup poll shows a clear shift in the US, where American support for the Israeli military action in Gaza has dropped to 32 percent, and disapproval has soared to 60 percent. For a while, Israel was enabled to "fool all the people some of the time," and it continues to "fool some of the people all the time," but ultimately, and as the latest poll shows, it "cannot fool all the people all the time."

Yet, babies are starving, the genocide continues, and there is no ceasefire in sight. This is only possible because Netanyahu and AIPAC continue to wag the dogs of Washington.



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FILE PHOTO: AFP

scheme to "lie, deny, and distort the truth." In the article, I detailed a long list of Israeli lies and how the US media disseminated the disinformation with little to no effort to verify or challenge. You see, Israel does not just enjoy political impunity from the US administration; it also has the freedom to lie with complete immunity from the US media.

The daunting question remains: how many lies must Israel tell before the media call them out, just as they do with the US President Donald J Trump, or other leaders and nations?

A recent example of how the Israeli-managed "free" media misrepresents facts

Palestinians rejected a proposal short of a lasting ceasefire, Netanyahu cried foul. President Trump and Witkoff rushed to absolve Netanyahu's intransigence to accept a permanent ceasefire, and then blamed the Palestinians.

The reluctance, and perhaps intimidation, of Arab mediators like Qatar and Egypt to publicly challenge Washington's pro-Israel stance has only deepened the media distortions. The mediators' silence allowed Netanyahu's false narratives to dominate international discourse.

Nonetheless, the tide could be turning. France and the UK's recent promise to

stakeholders.

In addition to government initiatives, pharmaceutical industry leaders must step forward to curb aggressive marketing. In reality, due to unchecked and excessive promotional tactics, the marketing expenditure of many companies has ballooned to an unsustainable 60 to 70 percent of total costs, a burden that undermines long-term viability. These inflated costs are inevitably passed onto consumers, making essential medicines increasingly unaffordable and exposing the industry to public backlash.

Currently, the top 10 pharmaceutical companies control about 65 to 70 percent of Bangladesh's pharmaceutical market. The top 20 hold 80 to 85 percent, and the top 30 control nearly 90 percent. If these companies work together—by ceasing unnecessary competition and adopting a joint policy to reduce marketing expenditure—they can easily maintain a sustainable business model without jeopardising their profits.

Moreover, doctors are unlikely to stop prescribing drugs from these top companies, as their products are trusted and well-established. If physicians were to replace these with substandard brands, it could spark public outrage—something no medical professional wants to risk. Therefore, the credibility of top companies will likely remain intact, even without aggressive promotion.

In this context, to ensure a robust and sustainable future, pharmaceutical leaders must voluntarily abandon aggressive marketing and pursue a structured, efficient, ethical, and sustainable marketing strategy. Simply put, the industry must cultivate a culture of internal accountability and self-regulation.

Failure to do so would jeopardise not just profits, but also impact the entire industry, public health, and the well-being of the people.

How aggressive drug marketing can be curbed



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SYED ABDUL HAMID

The National Drug Policy of 1982 enabled Bangladesh to achieve self-sufficiency in pharmaceutical production. Today, approximately 98 percent of the country's medicine demand is met by local manufacturers, with exports reaching around 150 countries. The pharmaceutical industry has become a major player in Bangladesh's industrial landscape, contributing about 1.8 percent to the national GDP. Currently, over 300 companies are engaged in the manufacturing of allopathic drugs, while 206 firms produce Ayurvedic medicines and 44 companies manufacture herbal products.

However, the sector is now facing a serious crisis, primarily caused by overly aggressive marketing strategies. Through medical representatives, pharmaceutical companies are allegedly spending vast amounts under the guise of offering gifts, honoraria, foreign trips, and participation in scientific conferences to doctors, paramedics, village doctors, quacks, and even salespersons at local drugstores. The situation has now become such that many beneficiaries feel entitled to request household items or even support for their children's needs from pharmaceutical companies.

These marketing practices contribute less to market expansion and more to unnecessary competition, wasteful expenditure, unethical influence over physicians, and most alarmingly, a steep rise in drug prices.

Despite the massive scale of this industry,

Bangladesh lacks an adequate and effective regulatory infrastructure. At present, the sector is regulated by the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA), which oversees drug company approvals, individual drug registrations, raw material certification, pharmacovigilance, regular inspections, pharmacy licensing, and drug pricing.

The DGDA is also responsible for approving bioequivalence and biosimilar tests, which are crucial for assessing the quality of medicines. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 2023 has further expanded the DGDA's jurisdiction to include the regulation of cosmetics. Since many pharmaceutical owners are actively involved in politics and some even served as parliamentary members, it has been increasingly difficult for the DGDA, a directorate-level institution, to regulate such a powerful and politically connected industry effectively.

Therefore, it is imperative to upgrade the DGDA into a full-fledged commission or authority, led by an individual of ministerial rank. This body should be supported with a modern organisational structure, an independent pay scale, regular recruitment of qualified professionals, clear career paths, and domestic and international training opportunities. Such reforms would significantly enhance the capacity of the regulatory body to meet current challenges.

However, the DGDA should not be involved in drug pricing. According to the 1982 drug

policy, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is responsible for determining and controlling the prices of 117 essential medicines based on a pre-established formula, with assistance from the DGDA. Yet in practice, this is rarely done. As the ministry is a direct organ of the government, any price hike becomes politically sensitive, impacting the government's image. Consequently, the prices of these essential drugs are seldom revised.

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Without regular, rational price adjustments, producing these essential drugs becomes commercially unviable. As a result, most companies have stopped manufacturing them. The 1982 policy mandated that every drug manufacturer allocate 60 percent of their production to essential drugs. In return, they were allowed to determine the prices of other drugs themselves.

To keep medicine prices within reasonable limits, there is no alternative to formula-based pricing determined by the government. Not only would this ensure affordability, but it would also help eliminate aggressive marketing practices, as the associated costs would then be borne by the pharmaceutical companies themselves. Currently, as drug prices are largely set by companies with DGDA's approval, marketing costs are ultimately passed on to consumers. Therefore, all drug pricing should be based on a transparent, government-prescribed formula.

In this regard, the cost components used in price calculation should be logically categorised. Additionally, the mark-ups for manufacturers and retailers must be regularly reviewed and set rationally. The 1982 policy defined five cost categories for essential drug pricing, which were expanded to nine categories in the 2005 policy.

It is important to remember that medicine is a commercial product, and thus, no company will produce it without adequate profit. At the same time, life-saving drugs must not be a source of excessive profits. However, involving DGDA in drug pricing creates a conflict with its core mandate. Meanwhile, if the health ministry remains directly responsible for pricing, it will find it difficult to update prices regularly. It is also unrealistic to expect that any committee can perform such a wide-ranging task regularly.

Therefore, Bangladesh must establish a powerful, independent authority for drug pricing, similar to India's National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority. This approach would ensure that the responsibility of pricing decisions does not fall solely on the government, sparing it from political and reputational risks. Simultaneously, regular pricing updates would reduce uncertainty for drug companies, and consumers would be protected from abrupt price surges. This presents a win-win scenario for all stakeholders.

In addition to government initiatives, pharmaceutical industry leaders must step forward to curb aggressive marketing. In reality, due to unchecked and excessive promotional tactics, the marketing expenditure of many companies has ballooned to an unsustainable 60 to 70 percent of total costs, a burden that undermines long-term viability. These inflated costs are inevitably passed onto consumers, making essential medicines increasingly unaffordable and exposing the industry to public backlash.

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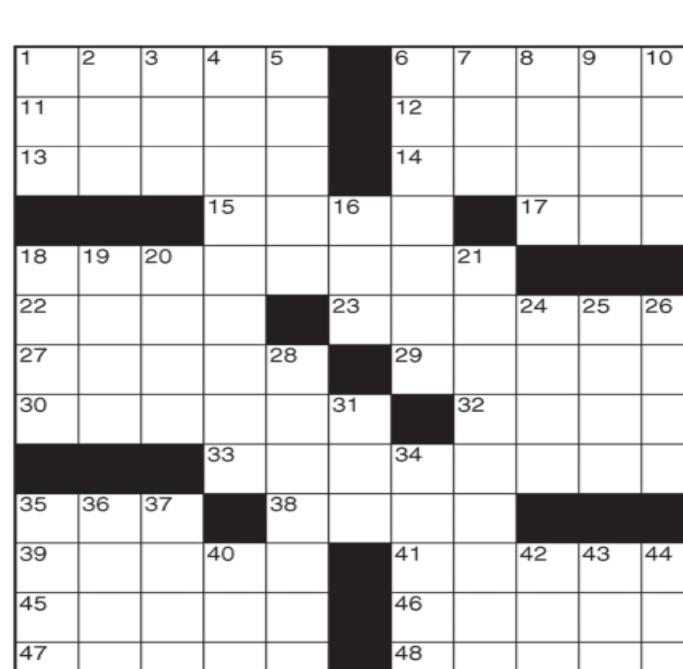
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CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Post-surgery regimen, for short
6 This symbol: ,
11 "Once upon - ..."
12 Be patient for
13 Florida city
14 Slow tempo
15 Continental coin
17 Slangy agreement
18 Appetizers
22 Red-ink amount
23 Cinco de Mayo event
27 Group of top players
29 Online messages
30 Trail mix bit
32 Land in the sea
33 Soaks
34 This symbol: &
35 Femur's upper end
- 38 Harry Belafonte hit
39 Boise's state
41 Fill with joy
45 Subject
46 Castle part
47 This symbol: /
48 Contemptuous look
1 Mouse's cousin
2 Greek vowel
3 That fellow
4 This symbol: &
5 Humdinger
6 Diet unit
7 Have debts
8 Quite a few
9 Spider's kin
10 Resting on

- 16 Game caller
18 Open-handed hit
19 Carryall
20 On the ocean
21 This symbol: ;
24 Robe feature
25 Mosaic piece
26 Pub orders
28 Writer Iris
31 Brewed drink
34 Russian denials
35 Top 10 records
36 Pop star
37 One of a bear trio
40 That fellow's
42 Really impress
43 Golf support
44 Mess up



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